

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
POLLUTION REPORT

I. HEADING

Date: February 6, 2001
Subject: Harrison Post Office Mercury Spill
From: Ken Theisen, OSC, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region V, Chicago
To: C. Beasley, U.S. EPA, HQ, Washington, DC (fax) 703.603.913
R. Karl, U.S. EPA, ERB, Chief, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.353.9170
L. Nachowicz, U.S. EPA, ERB/ESS, RS3, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.353.9170
W. Messenger, U.S. EPA, ERB/ESS, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.353.9170
G. Narsete, U.S. EPA, ERB, RS, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.353.9170
H. Bogda, U.S. EPA, ORC, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.886.0747
J. O'Brian, Illinois EPA, Springfield, IL (fax) 217.782.1433
B. Szuszkiewicz, CDOE, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.744.6458
G. Marchese, USPS, Chicago, IL (fax) 312.983.6300

POLREP # 1 & Final**II. BACKGROUND**

Site No: NA 0504113
CERCLIS No: NA ILN000508153
Response Authority: CERCLA
Demobilization Date: NA
Status of Action Memorandum: Ongoing

Delivery Order No: NA
ERNS No: NA
NPL Status: Not listed
Completion Date: February 2, 2001

III. SITE DESCRIPTION

- A. Incident Category:** Active Facility
- B. Site Location:** 358 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

1. **Site Description:** The Harrison Post Office Mercury Spill site is located at an active U.S. Postal Service (USPS) facility at 358 West Harrison Street in downtown Chicago, Illinois. The incident occurred in the facility parking lot, which is directly east of the post office building and just south of Congress Parkway. To the south and east are commercial properties.

On Saturday, January 27, 2001, U.S. EPA received a call from the City of Chicago Department of Environment (CDOE) concerning a mercury spill that had occurred. On Saturday evening USPS had analyzed a suspicious package addressed to the Chicago Police Department (CPD). After viewing x-rays, USPS contacted CPD, which dispatched a bomb squad to further analyze the package. Inside the cardboard package was a section of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe that was approximately 10 inches long and capped on both ends. In the x-rays, a small bottle was visible inside the pipe that was presumed to contain mercury. The CPD bomb squad used a blank shot and shotgun to open one end of the pipe in the post office parking lot. Although the bomb squad was successful in opening the pipe without damaging the bottle inside, some mercury that had leaked out of the bottle was scattered in the parking lot.

2. **Description of Threat:** Mercury and mercury vapor are known to be toxic to humans. Exposure to elevated levels of mercury vapor can cause permanent damage to the kidneys, the brain, and a developing fetus. Symptoms of exposure include nausea, skin rashes, eye irritation, and increased blood pressure. Absorption of mercury through the skin can cause damage to the skin, eyes, respiratory system, central nervous system, and kidneys.

Beads of mercury were found to be present in a 25- by 25- foot area in a corner of the parking lot. The mercury was mixed in with snow and ice. Because of the low ambient temperature (25 °F) and the fact that the spill had occurred outdoors in an unoccupied area, mercury vapor levels were of minimal concern. Potential dermal contact with mercury and potential mercury migration to a nearby drain were more immediate threats.

C. Preliminary Assessment/Site Inspection Results

On Sunday, January 28, 2001, U.S. EPA and the Tetra Tech EM Inc. Superfund Technical Assessment and Response Team (START) arrived at the site to perform an assessment and oversee cleanup of the mercury and contaminated area. Police had blocked the entrance to the parking lot, and a 25- by 25- foot area had been cordoned off with tape in the northeast corner of the lot where the spill had occurred. Many small beads of mercury were visible within the containment area, but no mercury was found outside of the area. The immediately impacted area measured approximately 4- by 4- feet. A curb drain was present about 30 feet from where the spill had occurred, but it was found to be blocked with ice and debris, so offsite migration was not an immediate concern.

IV. RESPONSE INFORMATION

A. Situation

1. **Current situation:** The Harrison Post Office Mercury Spill site has been remediated.
2. **Removal activities to date:** On Sunday, January 28, 2001, U.S. EPA contacted an Emergency and Rapid Response Services (ERRS) contractor to perform the mercury cleanup. Once on site, the ERRS contractor shoveled all the snow, ice, and debris located within the containment area into 55-gallon polyethylene drums. The bottle of mercury was placed in a 5-gallon, overpacked container. After the snow, ice, and debris were removed the area was swept with a mercury vacuum to retrieve any small beads of mercury that might have been overlooked. U.S. EPA and START performed a final inspection of the containment area to ensure that all of the mercury and contaminated material had been removed. The drums of contaminated material were staged in a location visible to the parking lot security camera for later disposal.

On Friday, February 2, 2001, the drums of contaminated material were shipped to the SET Treatment One disposal facility in Houston, Texas, under manifest number 02321809.

3. **Enforcement:** NA

B. Planned Removal Actions NA

C. Next Steps NA

D. Key Issues NA

V. COSTS (as of February 6, 2001)

Extramural Costs:

ERRS	\$3,150
START	\$1,500

Intramural Costs:

U.S. EPA	NA
----------	----

The accounting of expenditures presented above is an estimate based on figures known to the U.S. EPA On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) at the time this report was written. The OSC does not necessarily receive specific figures for the final payments made to any contractor. Other financial data that the OSC must rely upon may not be entirely up to date. The cost accounting provided in this report does not necessarily represent an exact monetary figure that the government may include in any claim for cost recovery.

VI. DISPOSITION OF WASTES

Waste Stream	Quantity	Disposal Facility
Contaminated snow, ice, and debris from parking lot; small bottle containing mercury	Three 55-gallon drums One 5-gallon, overpacked container	SET Treatment One 5745 Cheswood Road Houston, TX 77087 Telephone: (713) 645-8710 U.S. EPA ID No. TXD0551655388